



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

March 31, 1995

Ms. Laura S. Groce
Henslee, Ryan, & Groce
Great Hills Plaza
9600 Great Hills Trail
Suite 300 West
Austin, Texas 78759-6303

OR95-177

Dear Ms. Groce:

On behalf of Carthage Independent School District, you ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Open Records Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. You assert that the requested information is excepted from required public disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 30737.


The Open Records Act imposes a duty on governmental bodies seeking an open records decision pursuant to section 552.301 to submit that request to the attorney general within 10 days after the governmental body's receipt of the request for information. The time limitation found in section 552.301 is an express legislative recognition of the importance of having public information produced in a timely fashion. *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.--Austin 1990, no writ). When a request for an open records decision is not made within the time period prescribed by section 552.301, the requested information is presumed to be public. See Gov't Code § 552.302. This presumption of openness can only be overcome by a compelling demonstration that the information should not be made public. See, e.g., Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977) (presumption of openness overcome by a showing that the information is made confidential by another source of law or affects third party interests).

We realize that the short time frame prescribed by section 552.301 may occasionally impose a substantial burden on governmental bodies seeking to comply with the act. Accordingly, when we receive a request for an open records decision that lacks some information necessary for us to make a determination, it has been our policy to give the governmental body an opportunity to complete the request. On January 3, 1995, we asked you for copies of the records at issue. To date we have not received the requested copies.

The Open Records Act places on the custodian of public records the burden of establishing that records are excepted from public disclosure. Attorney General Opinion H-436 (1974). Your request for an open records decision remains incomplete. Without the information requested from you, this office is unable to evaluate the exception you raised. Consequently, we find that you have not met your burden under sections 552.301 - .303 of the act and that the information is presumed to be public.¹

In the absence of a demonstration that the information is confidential by law or that other compelling reasons exist as to why the information should not be made public, you must release the information. *See also* Gov't Code § 552.352 (the distribution of confidential information is a criminal offense). If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Rebecca L. Payne
Section Chief
Open Government Section

RLP/mes

Ref.: ID# 30737

cc: Ms. Jeri Stone
P.O. Box 1489
Austin, Texas 78767

¹In addition, it appears that the school district has failed to submit its request for a decision within the ten-day period mandated by the act. The school district had received the November 16, 1994 request letter by November 21, 1994, the date in which the district appears to have faxed the letter to your office. However, the corresponding request for an open records decision was not made to this office until December 7, 1994.